DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 149 314 CS 003 889

AUTHOR Donlan, Dan
TITLE Read Chapter Six and Fill Out the Worksheet.
PUB DATE Dec 77
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (27th, New Orleans, Louisiana, December 1-3, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Reading; *Preservice Education; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; Secondary Education; *Student Needs; Student Teaching; *Teacher Education; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The vast majority of high school students have passed beyond the reading-acquisition stage and face the problem of reading to get meaning from their textbooks. This paper discusses the need for teachers to help students learn from textbooks in the content areas and outlines a program that could train prospective content teachers to help students learn from texts. The course would involve participants in examining the nature of the high school and of the high school student population; examining the nature of the content area to be taught; developing strategies for teaching students to learn from texts; and obtaining sequentially programmed and supervised field experience. (GW)

READ CHAPTER SIX AND FILL OUT THE WORKSHEET

Dan Donlan

University of California, Riverside

What follows is a series of sentences any given high school student might encounter in a typical school day:

(1)

> If solid, liquid, and gaseous states of matter are determined by the spacing and activity of particles, a substance could be changed from one state to another by changing the spacing and activity of particles (Otto and Towle, 1973, 39).

(2)

> If 6 times the sum of twice a number and 8 is decreased by 4, the result if 1 less than 3 times the sum of the number and 6. Find the number (Nichols and others, 1974, p. 75).

(3)

> The Declaration summaried colonial complaints, appealed to liberals in America and Europe, and acted as a call to arms. Its adoption occasioned jubilation and festivity throughout the colonies (Shafer and others, 1973, p. 87).

(4)

> Out of the blue-black bruise in the distance crept a long line of moving lights upon the desolation of the land, and the twelve men of Fish gathered like ghosts at the shanty depot to watch the passing of the seven o'clock train, the Transcontinental Express from Chicago (Fitzgerald, in Kneer and others, 1972, p. 13).

Any number of high school students if asked to read these passages aloud would have only occasional problems in phrasing and pronunciation.

But upon finishing might ask the same question my ten-year-old son posed after he had finished a particularly dramatic oral interpretation of a Jack Anderson editorial: "Now, what does it mean?" That students can know how to read and yet not understand what they are reading is an enigma to many high school teachers. Yet, even the biology teacher who understands passage (1), might have problems with passage (4). And I, a follower of Fitzgerald, can deal with "the blue-black bruise," but can't get past "6 times the sum of twice a number and 8."

These examples highlight the dualistic nature of reading: learning to read versus reading to learn. Whereas a number of high school students might still be in the reading acquisition stage (learning to decode, developing word attack skills, engaging in language development exercises), the vast majority of high school students are beyond acquisition and facing the serious problem of getting meaning from their textbooks.

Getting high school teachers, content specialists, to accept the responsibility of teaching these students to learn from textbooks would be much easier if the phrase "reading in the content areas" were replaced by a clumsier yet more accurate phrase "learning from textbooks in the content areas." As long as "reading" is considered that activity confined to primary grades and special labs, students who know how to read will continue to be branded as nonreaders because they can't "read chapter six for homework and answer the study questions at the end."

In the Fall of 1958, I had branded 25 of the 35 students in my English 3 class as nonreaders for not passing my test on Greek and Roman mythology. It was an especially painful experience: it was my first

test, my first class, my first job. What I didn't know was that I was only one of many first year teachers that have to deal with a first shattering experience--the examination that no one passes, the discussion that no one participates in, or the sure-fire vaudeville act that draws only indifferent or hostile responses from the audience. Initially, these experiences cause us to utter uncharitable epithets about our students, our textbooks, and our classroom conditions. Then when these initial reactions have subsided, we luxuriate in self-blame. Further reflection may cause us to see the real problem--that we had assumed too much. Take me, for instance. I had assumed that the students wanted to read about Greek and Roman mythology, assumed that they could read the chapters independently, assumed that they had internalized the information contained in the chapters, assumed that they knew how to take examinations, and assumed that the inability of any student to master 60 percent of the test's content signified that that student was a failure. In effect, I was guilty of the rankest type of what Herber (1970) calls <u>assumptive teaching</u>: assigning text material for my students to read without making sure that they could get meaning from what they read.

Consider the harmful effects of assumptive teaching. Imagine what would happen if the driver training teacher assigned new students cars which they could drive independently at their own speed. What swimming teacher would achieve tenure by pushing beginning students off the deep end of the pool while exhorting them to get to the shallow end by whatever means they could? What art teacher assigns a nightly picture for homework, to be painted on any subject, using any brushes, or any kind of paint?

If it is blatantly foolish to be assumptive about the teaching of physical skills, isn't it equally foolish to be assumptive about reading and thinking skills?

In effect, the content teacher must face the realization that if students are to learn the content, only the content teacher can teach it--even if it means teaching the students to get meaning from textbooks. After all, it's a rare reading teacher who can understand, with equal ease, woodshop, trigonometry, and chemistry textbooks.

Accomplishing the task of teaching text is easier in pre-service education that in inservice education. Although many successful inservice projects can readily disprove the adage "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," the attitudes of credential candidates are more shapable than those of experienced teachers, mainly because the teacher training institution can control much of the input. A program that could train beginning content teachers to teach students to learn from text would emerge in four stages.

First Stage: Examining the Nature of the American High School

Those who glibly argue that high schools should return to the "basics" of the 1930s and 1940s may well be ignorant of the quarter-century of educational change that precludes such a retreat. Since 1950, the geometric growth of knowledge and technology has effected a burgeoning curriculum that can be almost simultaneously innovative and obsolete. Not only is there more to know now than there was twenty-five years ago, there is also more to forget. In addition, there are more high school

students completing twelfth grade than ever before. With this expanded population comes a wide range of interests, abilities, and attitudes that must be dealt with within any given classroom. Lou Burmeister (1972) notes that the range of ability within any classroom can equal two-thirds of the average chronological age of the students within that classroom. Specifically, in a normally distributed population, students in a tenth-grade class could exhibit a range in reading level from fifth grade to college junior (grade 15) level. Students in a twelfth-grade class, could range from sixth grade to graduate school level (grade 18). In other words, the farther students go in school the wider the differences among them become. In addition to an expanding curriculum and an expanding student population, the high school must compete with "pop culture" and television. Students, conditioned to passive learning, often fail to respond to traditional active learning from text. Whether we like it or not, schools have changed, curriculum has changed, students have changed. Consequently, student teachers, highly motivated learners themselves, should not allow their parochial and romantic perceptions of education to supersede a hard look at classroom reality.

Second Stage: Examining the Nature of the Content Area

A high school credential candidate generally enters a student teaching program with a Bachelor's degree in a content field he hopes to teach in high school. Occasionally, the baccalaureate training is mismatched to the demands of the high school curriculum. The student with a B.A. in English is often trained as a literary scholar; whereas many of the courses that a high school English teacher is assigned include written composition, speaking, language and linguistics, and the study of popular media. The

student with a B.A. in history or a B.S. in geography, sociology, or psychology may be assigned "social studies" classes that integrate four or more disciplines. The student with a B.S. in chemistry might be assigned a general science class just as the student with a B.S. in mathematics might be assigned a class in basic arithmetic. Methods courses are invaluable in bridging the gap between university academics and the high school curriculum. What the high school teacher gains from the baccalaureate program, hopefully, is a mode of inquiry. For the English teacher, it is the critical mode; for the social studies and science teacher, it is the problem solving mode. With a mode of inquiry, a student teacher can more easily conceptualize his content area by (1) developing a rationale for why students should study in the area, (2) isolate basic ideas that shape the field, (3) determine what reading and thinking skills students would need to be taught to master the basic ideas, and (4) to understand basic ideas and technical vocabulary so well that he can explain them to the students in simple, understandable language.

Third Stage: Developing Strategies for Teaching Students to Learn From Text

Now the student teacher must translate the combined knowledge of high school curriculum and a content field into classroom strategies that help a wide range of students learn from text. The student teacher might want to begin with single text strategies, sequentially arranged to insure the student's progress from dependent learning to independent learning. Working with the class as a whole, the student teacher might present the first three reading assignments as directed reading activity (Burmeister, 1974, pp. 76-79), and supplement the next few reading assignments with

reading/learning guides, including glossing (Herber, 1970). Although these guides are first used as a basis for the teacher's interacting with the total class, as time passes the teacher can relegate the guides to small group activity, and finally to individual student activity. When students exhibit facility at dealing with reading/learning guides, working individually, they may be ready to move to SQ3R, as the teacher shows the students how to survey text material, ask and answer their own questions.

So far the class has been reading the same text materials. The teacher may next want to move to multiple-text strategies which permit groups of students and, later, individual students to select their own reading materials which will form the basis of oral presentations, library projects, inquiry and problem solving.

In getting students to react to what they are reading, the teacher will want to provide a rich variety of speaking (e.g., discussion, dramatics) and writing activities and be prepared to show the students how to perform the activities.

Thus, as the teacher moves the students from single-text strategies, where the entire class reads the same text materials, to multiple-text strategies, where groups of students, and, later, individual students, select their own text materials, students become increasingly independent learners.

Fourth Stage: Field Experience

Sequentially programed and supervised field experiences, beginning with extensive observation and concluding with full-time student teaching, permit the student teacher to implement and evaluate those classroom strategies developed in Stage Three. Along the way, student teachers

should be assigned to content area classrooms as teacher-assistants working first with small groups of students who have problems with text reading and later with entire classes.

Conclusion

High school students don't have to read. They can get information from lectures, radio, and television. But they pay a heavy price. As George Orwell noted, when a person doesn't read he isn't free, because he must depend upon an outsider controlling the message. The teacher should not be "the outsider" controlling the message. In teaching students to learn from text, we offer the best we have to give--a chance for freedom.

References

Burmeister, Lou. Reading strategies for secondary school teachers. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1974.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The diamond as big as the Ritz. In Leo B. Kneer (Ed.) Edges of Reality: Confrontations with the Uncanny, the Macabre, and the Mad. Glenview: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1972.

Frankel, Jack R. Helping students think and value. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Herber, Harold L. Teaching reading in content areas. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Nichols, Eugene D. and others. Holt Algebra 1. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, c. 1974.

Otto, James H. and Albert Towle. Modern Biology. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1973.

Shafer, Boyd C. and others. United States History for high schools. River Forest: Laidlaw Brothers, 1973.

Singer, Harry and Dan Donlan. Reading and Learning from Text. (book in completion).